



Leading by Nature  
by Giles Hutchins



**Heart Breathing:** Whether you are sitting or standing, first off become aware of your breath. As you breathe in and out, feel your lungs move up and down and your stomach in and out. Feel the breath in your nostrils, cool as it comes in, warm as it goes out. Let's embark on a couple of rounds of conscious breathing to settle our awareness and bring our attention into our bodies while allowing grasping thoughts to ease as our awareness deepens. If the situation allows, we can place both hands over our heart area, one hand above the other, so one is covering the lower heart region and the other the upper heart region of our chest area in a gentle way. If the situation does not allow, then we can simply imagine we are placing our hands over our heart area and bring our attention into our heart region as we do so.

Then, with our imagination, we breathe in and out through the heart area (as if breathing through where our hands are places over our heart). Do a few rounds of this heart breathing, breathing in and out deeply and consciously as we focus on the heart area. This 'heart breathing' amplifies our heart-awareness while helping our bodymind coherence within us (improving our sympathetic and parasympathetic network alignment as well as our left and right brain coherence). We may notice a subtle shift in how we feel, perceive and attend to what is emerging around us; a simple yet profound shift in conscious from head to heart occurs within us no matter how fleeting.

**Heart Entrainment:** Let's find a space where we can be free to relax uninterrupted for four minutes - this could well be the office toilet or nearby park bench, for instance, unless our organization happens to have dedicated quiet spaces which, alas, is still the exception rather than the rule, but times they are a changing! When comfortable, we start with the practice of heart breathing, as above.

Then, when we feel ourselves breathing deeply and calmly in and out through our heart region, we use our imagination to recall a memory and feeling of something we really love (this might be, for instance, a memory of a pet we have or once had, a favourite song, a walk in nature, playing with our children, a special memory of a time in our lives when we felt really happy and alive – it does not matter what it is, only that it invokes a feeling of love within us). While still doing our heart breathing, we conjure up this feeling of love, and re-live this loving feeling with our imagination, really feeling it in our heart. Then, we allow this loving feeling to start to expand from our heart region throughout our body. Feel this loving feeling spread into our legs and arms, our toes, fingers and spine, our neck and head, all over our body; allow ourselves to indulge in this feeling, immerse ourselves in it, as we continue with our heart breathing. Feel every cell and sinew in our body being washed and cleansed with this feeling of love.

As we allow ourselves to relax into this feeling of love, we undertake an affirmation, which we can either verbalize softly out loud, or if the situation dictates we can simply say it in our mind: 'I am able to fully love myself'. Repeat this statement over and over at least five times to ourselves while we are still heart breathing and still feeling this expanded feeling of love. Then, we simply relax and sit for a few moments, for as long as our situation allows us. Again, notice how our perception, awareness and way of attending to 'what is' in our lives at this moment has subtly shifted compared to how we were before we undertook the exercise.

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As we practice this exercise more and more, we can change our affirmation to be something related to an improvement we would like to see occur in our relations with our work environment. As long as the affirmation has a loving intent (for example, 'I am able to lovingly accept my boss for who she is', or 'I am able to compassionately listen and empathize with my team members') it will help reprogram patterns of behavior within us, allowing us to cultivate heart-awareness within ourselves while alleviating our ego-reactions to situations.

'The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen nor touched but are felt in the heart'. Helen Keller, political activist

**Head-heart-gut coherence:** Like with the heart entrainment exercise, we find a space where we can be free to relax uninterrupted for at least four minutes. We start with the heart breathing and then move on to the heart entrainment exercise, as above. Then, rather than doing the affirmation, we consciously bring our feeling of love into our head and notice what thoughts arise; we notice these thoughts without getting overly involved in them while being conscious of maintaining our loving feeling. It is quite normal for judgemental or anxious thoughts to creep in, and as this happens we simply notice them and cultivate the feeling of love again while bringing our attention to our heart breathing. Bringing our awareness back to our heart breathing provides a great anchor.

As we move our conscious awareness from the head back down into the heart region, we remain in the heart for a few breaths and sense what it feels like, and then we move this awareness down into our gut region and sense what it feels like to be in the gut region (our navel area and abdomen), noticing any emotions, feelings, thoughts, sensations – but resisting the temptation to judge or form opinions about these subtle sensations, we just sit with the sensations. It is normal to sense fear or anxiety, yet we try not to react to these feelings or suppress them, but simply let them be. We use our heart breathing to bring ourselves back to the feeling of love if we are starting to get caught up in other emotions. We then move our attention, and feeling of love, from our gut back into our heart region and allow it to just remain there for a while and notice any subtle differences in feelings and felt-sensations. This particular activity can be a useful one to undertake at the end of a stressful day, perhaps just after some light stretching exercises such as T'ai chi or Qi Gong movements.